

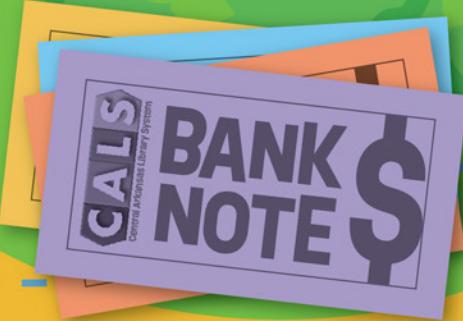
Your
adventure
begins at
CALS

Central Arkansas Library System

2023
Ahhual
Report

CALS

CENTRAL
ARKANSAS
LIBRARY
SYSTEM



The Rules:

Letter from Nate Coulter

When I sit down to play a new game, I always encounter a moment of reluctance related to figuring out the rules.

Maybe that's something people experience when they are being introduced to the library. The good news is that at CALS, the rules are short and simple: apply for a free library card by supplying a minimal amount of personal information. Then you can enjoy all the benefits that come with access to the library's digital resources and brick-and-mortar locations.

Your CALS card is one of the most valuable items in your wallet. It affords unlimited (almost) access to books, audiobooks, e-books, movies, and music, all free of charge. Whether you're seeking entertainment or educational enrichment, CALS can help. All you need is your library card.

We have events and programs for all ages. Count UP provides free math tutoring for kids in grades K-12, while our digital literacy department offers assorted classes focused on navigating a variety of digital spaces.



Let's get started!



Rather than us telling you in the following pages why we think CALS is great, we've gathered stories from people whose lives were affected by the library this year.

Our libraries are a place for adventure, for learning, and, most importantly, for everyone. Pick out a playing piece you like, and let's get started on our journey around the board. You'll be glad you played.



But wait! There's more to this CALS game!

You can land on the Be Mighty space, where the library feeds kids at our branches and helps them get to and from the library with a partnership with Rock Region METRO. A lot of spaces on our game board involve the work of programmers who create free events at each branch to enrich the lives of patrons in their area. There is the Ron Robinson Theater, where we offer fun movies on the big screen at affordable prices, as well as concerts and other events. We have art spaces, too, where we curate works that amplify and beautify the interiors of our libraries. And one of the most exciting places to land in this CALS game is on the Six Bridges Book Festival. That annual fall program brings the newest and most acclaimed authors to central Arkansas.

The 2023 trip around the CALS game board was an adventure. We spun some big numbers and we passed *GO!*

Yet, part of our journey last year did mean enacting temporary closures of two branches to begin extensive construction. Our popular Summer Reading Club program was renamed to Summer @ CALS and had record attendance. The Six Bridges Book Festival hosted 50 authors, including Christian Cooper and David Grann. Along with others, CALS dared to ask a federal court to stop a new state law from going into effect that would have subjected librarians to criminal charges and injected politicians into the fundamental issue of what books our cardholders could find at the library.

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Your adventure begins at  CALS

Locations

START



1 Library Square

100 Rock Street | Little Rock | 72201

Main Library

Bobby L. Roberts Library
of Arkansas History & Art

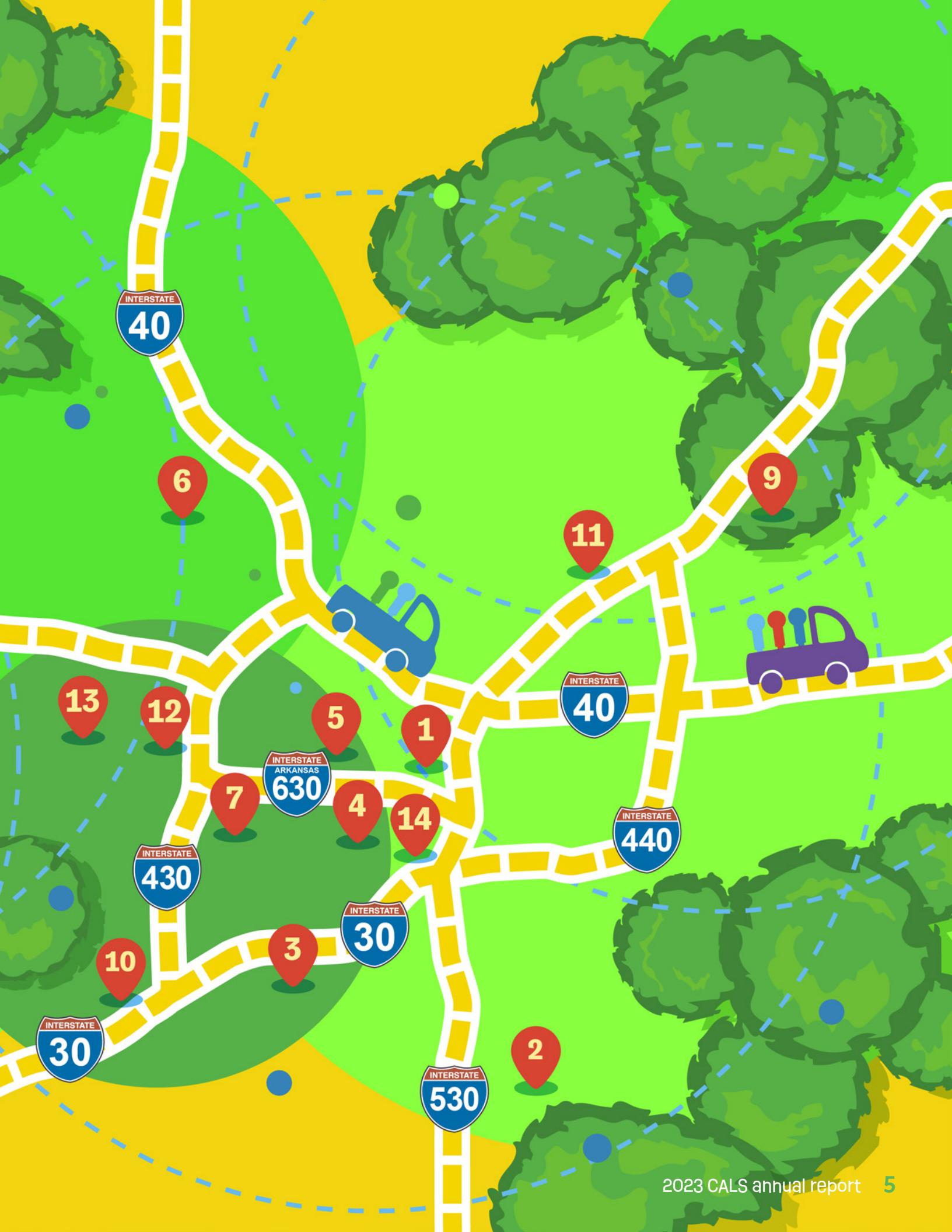
Ron Robinson Theater

Rock It! Lab

CALS Branches

- 2 **Millie M. Brooks MicroLibrary**
13024 Highway 365 South, Wrightsville 72183
- 3 **Dee Brown Library**
6325 Baseline Road, Little Rock 72209
- 4 **Hillary Rodham Clinton
Children's Library & Learning Center**
4800 West 10th Street, Little Rock 72204
- 5 **John Gould Fletcher Library**
823 North Buchanan Street, Little Rock 72205
- 6 **Maumelle Library**
10 Lake Pointe Drive, Maumelle 72113
- 7 **Sidney S. McMath Library**
2100 John Barrow Road, Little Rock 72204
- 8 **Max Milam Library**
609 Aplin Avenue, Perryville 72126

- 9 **Esther DeWitt Nixon Library**
703 West Main Street, Jacksonville 72076
- 10 **Oley E. Rooker Library**
11 Otter Creek Court, Little Rock 72210
- 11 **Amy Sanders Library**
10200 Johnson Drive, Sherwood 72120
- 12 **Adolphine Fletcher Terry Library**
2015 Napa Valley Drive, Little Rock 72212
- 13 **Roosevelt Thompson Library**
38 Rahling Circle, Little Rock 72223
- 14 **Sue Cowan Williams Library**
1800 Chester Street, Little Rock 72206



Terry Library, to the Rescue



“I first realized how much I had underestimated and underappreciated my local library, Terry Library, during Covid. During that time, I worked at home and did not visit family, travel, or venture out for dining or entertainment. In short, I was going crazy. My local library provided me with movies, TV series, and documentaries, which kept me sane. I felt I was not only entertained, but gaining knowledge and insight into subjects I might have overlooked otherwise. If they did not have the DVD I requested, they would reach out to another branch and still provide it for me. At one time, they even had a documentary I wanted to see shipped in from another state.

Then in 2023, my home was hit by the March 31 tornado. My husband and I moved to a hotel where we would spend seven and a half months. Again, my local library came to the rescue and provided me with a kind of therapy and the ability to cope. Not only did I check out DVDs, but I also attended the adult classes and summer workshops, which took my mind off my situation. I attended mostly art classes, but cooking, writing, and computer skills classes were offered as well. Fabio Delgado (Terry’s adult programmer) became a wonderful friend who encouraged me and loaned me art supplies so I could work from the hotel room. I was also given

an art journal, which was very helpful in my healing process.

I also attended classes at Roosevelt Thompson Library and Fletcher Library, where everyone was so nice and helpful.

Each branch location offers different free classes, events, exhibits, and things such as fishing poles, gardening equipment, etc. to check out. There seems to be something for everyone. I tell all my friends and family they are missing out if they don’t check out and support their local libraries.

Again, thank you for all you provide to our community, without cost, so all may enjoy.”

-Myra Eley



Count UP

In 2023, we helped 192 students through the Count UP program, with over 3,600 hours of instruction! The program is currently funded by an ARP ESSER III grant. Tutors offer instruction over Zoom and in person at library branches. The Count UP team currently consists of five part-time employee tutors and roughly 25 volunteer tutors of all ages and from all walks of life.

“I don’t think my daughter would have passed geometry this year without [her tutor’s] help! This was my daughter’s hardest year because her teacher couldn’t teach it to where she understood. Tyler worked tirelessly with us to find a tutor that explained it in a way my daughter could understand, and it paid off!”

-proud parent

Playground Dedication at the Children’s Library

In 2022, CALS won the Jerry Kline Community Impact Prize (\$250,000) and used almost all of the grant monies to install a playground at the Hillary Rodham Clinton Children’s Library & Learning Center. The playground is outfitted with monkey bars, slides, a rock wall, drums, and a variety of interactive teaching boards. The playground was dedicated on May 6, just in time for the kickoff events for the library’s 10th anniversary.



Volunteer Program

CALS operates with a wonderful staff, but we can’t forget the dedication of our volunteers. We currently have 1,296 volunteers on file at CALS. This past year, we had 668 volunteers donate 12,697.25 hours, for a cost savings of \$403,772.55 to the library. (The hourly rate for a volunteer in 2023 is \$31.80 per hour; provided by the Independent Sector with the Do Good Institute.)

Volunteers 14+ years of age provided service at our branch locations. Volunteers 16+ provided support to all the other areas throughout the system listed in the box on the right. The areas seeing the most increase in volunteer activity for 2023 were our outreach efforts and our branch locations. The Count UP math tutoring program had an increase in volunteers, too. And our number of volunteers on file increased significantly.

Volunteers by the Numbers

Volunteers throughout the system in 2023:

Branch Locations: **219**
Main Basement Sorting Room: **21**
Roberts Library/Galleries & Bookstore/Butler Center: **12**
Ron Robinson Theater: **8**
Friends Board: **3**
CALS Board of Trustees: **13**
Campaign Steering Committee: **12**
VISTAS: **3**
Meal Program: **4**
Six Bridges Book Festival: **71**
Count UP: **43**
Garden at the Children’s Library: **14**
Used Book Sales: **136**
Outreach: **109**
TOTAL: 668 volunteers



“The Gerald M. Kline Family Foundation and Library Journal congratulate CALS for its vision and community focus in designing a library oriented playground. It’s gratifying to see the prize used to create a novel library resource. This is sure to be a well-used and loved destination.”

—Congratulatory greeting from the founders of the Jerry Kline Community Impact Prize

Be Mighty Little Rock



“There are some who cannot make the distance and you reach them through those who can. There are no set qualifications for the provisions—so no one is turned away. No proof of being disadvantaged is required, or level of self-sustainment.”

—Be Mighty Little Rock Little Free Pantry patron

In 2023, Be Mighty Little Rock reached 2,986 community members through nutrition education programs and installed three new Little Free Pantries, bringing the total to eleven at CALS locations. Be Mighty continued to expand supplemental meal programs by installing a community refrigerator at Nixon Library shortly after the March 31 tornado left community members seeking aid. Local farmers, growers, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, and Potluck Food Rescue

have been essential partners in providing fresh food resources for community members and have continued their efforts into 2024. We also began working with Bridge 2 Success to provide hot and fresh after-school meals at eleven CALS sites, resulting in 47,895 meals served for the year, and Be Mighty METRO provided 25,511 rides for Little Rock citizens.

Be Mighty Little Rock is a partnership between the City of Little Rock and CALS.



Black History Month

February brings Black History Month each year, and despite it being the shortest month, CALS packed it full of events to mark the occasion. From book club events to crafts and educational discussions, CALS hosted more than 40 events in branches and with partners. Community Liaison Jessica McDaniel helped create the Black Family Expo at the Pankey Community Center and invited families to share their history with participants.



LRAFB Programming

“One of the things that we work the hardest on and are the most proud of is the work we do with the Little Rock Air Force Base (LRAFB). We are their main source of programming for kids and families. We had the musical group mömähdpöp out this summer with Summer @ CALS funds; we do all of their storytimes, as well as school age and YA programs, and help them throw a huge party for Dr. Seuss every year.”

—April Hicks, Nixon Library Manager



Library Book Pick Ups 24/7

In May, CALS added book lockers to four libraries: Main (currently Mini Main), Rooker, McMath, and Terry. These lockers give patrons a chance to pick up holds at their convenience, even if the best time is when the branch is closed. The funding for

these lockers came from funds obtained during the COVID closures. The plan had been to have them available to help with library closures and distancing, but they have come in quite handy with the closing of Main Library for the renovation.



The Digital Literacy Guides had **322 one-on-one help interactions.**

The Digital Literacy Team had **126 classes and outreaches**, with a total of **746 attendees.**

Digital Literacy

“What a great service. Jakeob was patient, well-informed, and a pleasure to talk with. I know a lot of folks would benefit from having him explain the everyday mysteries of today’s computers, cell phones, TV, emails, apps, and more. Jakeob answered questions we did not even know we had.” —Glen Nishimura

A special thank you to the Windgate Foundation for making our digital literacy program possible. This grant also supports the work of our community outreach team and provides funds to expand the availability of arts programming throughout the entire library system.



Community Resources



“There was a patron who came to visit me a couple of months ago; she was unsheltered, hungry, and recently was around someone with COVID-19. The first thing I did was give her a couple of tests to make sure of her Covid status. She turned out to be negative. Once we figured that out, she began to show her determination to become housed. I worked with her for a couple of months to get her ready to be

back in her own place. I referred her to various places to help her with getting her ID and other important documents. She came back to see me, and I gave her a list of potential places to stay. She came in to see me a month ago and she stated that she was housed. Not only is she housed, but she also has a full-time job and is working on getting a vehicle. This is a success story in that when she first came to see me,

she was in doubt that she would find somewhere to stay or work.

Once she was given the tools to help facilitate the change, she took it upon herself to follow through with what was provided to her by the Community Resources department and other agencies, thus going from unsheltered to being sheltered and working full time.”

-Mekkos Barbee,
CALS Social Worker



Disaster Strikes the Community

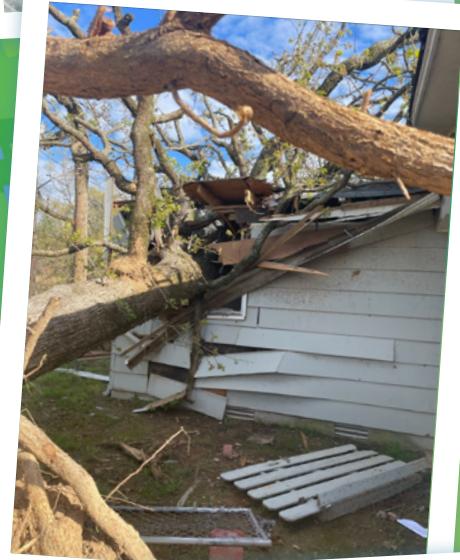
On March 31, a tornado hit central Arkansas, devastating communities near several library branches. CALS staff jumped at the opportunity to help. CALS was an integral part of helping people put their lives back in order. Many people found themselves displaced, some only temporarily while roads were blocked, and power was out. Some lost their homes. CALS created a committee to assist with coordinating efforts for a storm response. The libraries themselves provided the opportunity to access power, internet, and a place to print insurance claims and make photocopies of important documents. All faxing, scanning, and printing was done at no charge for months. Thanks to grants from Kum & Go, Delta Dental, and the Arkansas Community Foundation, CALS was able to distribute food and other resources. The outreach team also worked to provide wi-fi access, help with mobile printing, and meet other needs as they arose.

The maintenance team began working to clear parking lots and roads around the libraries that were affected. Once those areas were cleared, the team began

assisting staff who needed help with their homes, and then began helping other individuals in the neighborhoods that needed help. A dedicated Storm Recovery page on cals.org was created and listed all the resources available to get people back on their feet.

“CALS is a community-based organization; anything that happens to the community – especially the ones we serve – happens to us. I feel like it's my obligation to help, that's just me as a person, to help in any way possible. I've lived here almost my whole life, and if it ever happened to me, I would hope that someone would come to help me. Once we were out doing it, there were other volunteers out helping. You never know who else is going to show up and volunteer. We spent one day working with some guys from the Coast Guard. We bonded with them over the experience.”

-Jason Diemer,
Assistant Maintenance Manager



Ezra, the Super Reader



While at the 10th anniversary celebration for the Hillary Rodham Clinton Children's Library & Learning Center, we heard about a pretty amazing young boy. During the festivities, Secretary Clinton acknowledged the reading efforts of two exceptional readers, brought forward by Director of Programming Ellen Samples. While meeting with the readers and their families earlier in the year, it was brought up that Ezra had a reading goal.

But it's not your average reading goal. He wanted to read every book in the Kids' section at Sanders Library. Ezra finished up in November, and his Beanstack showed that he'd read **5,470 books**.

We asked his parents what motivates a kid to tackle such an undertaking.

That answer is: LEGO

After finishing his (self-imposed) challenge, he was allowed to pick out whatever LEGO set he wanted. We're told he doesn't currently have a new reading project but that he's moved into longer 300-page books. And he's been spending a lot more time on STEM projects.



We asked his parents what motivates a kid to tackle such an undertaking.

That answer is: LEGO





Children's Library Turns 10!

The Hillary Rodham Clinton Children's Library & Learning Center (CLLC) celebrated its 10th anniversary with a series of 10 events over the spring and summer. The celebrations began on March 16, the date the library officially opened in 2013, with the Birthday Kickoff extravaganza featuring drumming instructor Stephin Booth. Programs included a "Trip to the Theater," featuring a concert with kids' comedy band mömandpöp in the Linda Bly Theater; a "Picnic at the Playground" that served as the dedication for the newly added playground; and a color run.

On June 26, CLLC welcomed former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to the ninth event, "Cupcakes & Caterpillars." When the library opened in 2013, Secretary Clinton visited and read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to a group of eager children. The event's *Very Hungry Caterpillar* themed activities and snacks were a nod to that beginning. During her visit, Secretary Clinton took a tour of

the library to see all the changes that have taken place since she last visited. She took note of the new playground, the addition of the gallery space, and the beehives. She also learned about the important work that is being done in the library named for her, including the addition of Count UP math tutoring and Be Mighty Little Rock, a partnership with the city that was created in 2018.

While Secretary Clinton was on her tour, former President Bill Clinton made the rounds meeting patrons and staff, shaking hands, and posing for photos. Guests then made their way to the Linda Bly Theater, where comments were made by CALS Executive Director Nate Coulter, Mayor Frank Scott Jr., CALS Director of Programming Ellen Samples, former CALS Executive Director Bobby Roberts, and, of course, Secretary Clinton.



Reading Dragons Book Club

I am a mother to two children and aunt to four. My children are big readers and always love the Summer Reading Club through CALS, but I needed some motivation to keep up their love of reading throughout the whole year not just during the summer. My oldest nephew (11) struggled with reading and when the pandemic hit, he got lost in the mess and confusion of everything. My next nephew (8) is like my children and loves to read. He just needed motivation to continue reading throughout the year. But with both of my younger nephews (2 and 3), my sister and their doctor were worried about their lack of talking. A little background on our family history: there is a speech disorder; my youngest was diagnosed with it and reading to and with him has helped a lot.

My boss decided that the staff would stop working Fridays right before the summer. I wanted to spend more time

with my nephews, so I started keeping them on Fridays and bringing all the kids to Reading Dragon Club.

My children are very motivated to get some daily reading done so they can log more hours for more dragon cards. My eight-year-old nephew has done the same as my kids. With my oldest nephew, his teachers have commented about how much better his reading skills have gotten. Not just that, but he LOVES to read now! This is something my sister and I have been trying to work with him on. Wanting to get more dragon cards has made him work hard and get better. He has been checking out bigger chapter books when before he wouldn't check out any books that had too many chapters. With my younger two nephews, I would read to them during Dragon Club and have them work on repeating words back to me. After the third Friday at Reading Dragon

Club with me, the daycare spoke with my sister about how amazed they were with their vocabulary and the number of words they could say, and they said that they can't get them to stop talking or reciting parts of books.

I know it doesn't seem like much, but to my sister and me this book club has helped so much, and we are grateful for all the hard work and dedication put into it. I would love for this to be something that continues and maybe one day get a little bigger to reach more children. **”**

-Amber Taylor



CALS by the Numbers

(Unaudited)

\$ Revenue

Property Taxes
Capital Bond Property Taxes
Transfer 2022 Capital Bond Funds
State of Arkansas
Fines, Fees, Parking & Rental
Friends, CALS Foundation & Other Grant Income
Other Revenue
TOTAL

\$23,633,501
\$648,560
\$995,795
\$560,585
\$570,612

\$1,019,269
\$1,538,201

\$28,966,613

Expenses

Salaries and Benefits
Operating Expenses
Library Materials
Capital Expenses
2022 Bond Fund Expenses
TOTAL

\$15,907,782
\$6,655,473
\$2,309,069
\$842,491
\$995,795

\$26,710,610



In the Library

Staff Assistance

Reference Questions/
Instructional Help
All Other Staff Assistance
Minus Notary
Notary
Faxes
Computer Uses
(desktop/laptop/tablets/DVD players)

181,188

333,413

17,868

12,865

179,218

Meetings

Meetings	4,378	Door Count in Library	1,149,380
Study Rooms/Carrels	40,283	Curbside Count	1,590

Visits

Total Visits	1,150,970
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Programming

In-Person Onsite
In-Person Outreach
Virtual (live and recorded)
Passive
Grab-and-Go Kits

Programs

In-Person Onsite	5,343	# Attendees	110,113
In-Person Outreach	1,054		41,005
Virtual (live and recorded)	302		7,746
Passive	816		25,790
Grab-and-Go Kits	590		30,374
TOTAL All Programs	8,105		215,028



CALS Communications Department Wins Big

At the 2023 American Library Association Conference, the Communications Department collected two PR Xchange Awards for a 2022 Media Day Invitation and for a video promotion for the Used Book Sale.

In the fall, CALS received four MarCom Awards, which recognize excellence in marketing and communication. We received a Platinum MarCom Award for the 2022 Media Day Invitation and Gold Awards for the 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports. Additionally, a Gold Award was received in the category of Special Event for the Rock, Paper, Run 5K in collaboration with the North Little Rock Public Library System.

CALS Defends Free Speech and Its Collection of Books for Everyone

In 2023, some Arkansas legislators advanced a bill that distressed library staff across the state. SB 81 put librarians in danger of criminal charges for doing their jobs, and subordinated decisions about what books could remain accessible in the library to local political bodies. SB 81 passed the state House and Senate, and the governor signed it into law as Act 372 on March 31.

Section 1 of Act 372 established a new criminal offense in Arkansas called "furnishing a harmful item to a minor." Anyone, including a librarian, bookstore owner, or even a parent/guardian, who commits this crime punishable by up to a year in prison if he or she "furnishes, presents, provides, makes available, gives, lends, shows, advertises, or distributes to a minor an item that is harmful to minors." Separate laws define "minor" as anyone under 18 years of age, and "harmful to minors" as materials having sexually explicit descriptions or images that would meet the Supreme Court's definition of "obscenity" as to minors.

Section 5 created a mandatory process for a "person affected by" some item in the collection to challenge "the appropriateness" of having that item in the library's main collection. The term "appropriateness" was not defined in the law. If the library staff, in response to a challenge, declined to move the challenged book "to an area that is not accessible to minors," the challenger could appeal that decision to the governing body of the county or city that supports the library. In CALS's case, these appeals would be lodged with the City of Little Rock, since it provides the majority of CALS's funding.

In June, CALS and 16 other plaintiffs (including two locally owned bookstores, other libraries, the Arkansas Library Association, several patrons, the American Booksellers Association, and the Authors Guild) filed a lawsuit to block the implementation of these two sections of the law on the grounds that the provisions violated the U.S. Constitution's protection of free speech. Shortly before the law was to take effect on August 1, the federal judge presiding over the case, U.S. District Judge Timothy Brooks, ruled in CALS and the other plaintiffs' favor.

In finding that the "breadth of this legislation and its restrictions on constitutionally protected speech" are "unjustified," the court laid out that "the only way librarians and booksellers could comply with [Section 1 of] the law would be to keep minors away from any material considered obscene as to the youngest minors — in other words, any material with any amount of sexual content." The court also found that CALS and the other plaintiffs "have established a likelihood that Section 5 would permit, if not encourage, library committees and local government bodies to make censorship decisions based on content or viewpoint, which would violate the First Amendment."

The judge's ruling will stand until there is a final disposition of the case in the trial court, likely sometime late summer or fall 2024. The case will then surely be appealed to the Circuit Court. CALS will continue to stand against those who have lost sight of the core American value enshrined in our First Amendment, a principle that Judge Brooks's July 2023 order relied on: "the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable."



Summer @ CALS

"We have done so much outreach this year, but what really sticks out to me is the work we did at Our House over the summer. We visited their middle school kids twice a week doing literacy and STEM activities. These were a lot of the same kids we had seen the summer after coming out of COVID, and witnessing the growth and maturity they had gained in a year was great. We had a couple of kids who didn't participate for the first few weeks. Not sure if they didn't trust us, or just were intimidated. Watching them, week by week, come out of their shells, and by the end fully participating, was amazing."

-Amanda Orgel, Youth Services Coordinator



Summer @ CALS by the Numbers

In 2023, **9,518** people participated in Summer @ CALS, which is a 27% increase over 2022 and an **83% increase in participants** over 2021! The theme was "All Together Now!"

After 2022, it was decided to change the name of the popular "Summer Reading Club" to something that better encompassed everything that takes place. While reading is a focus, there's just so much more! There are STEM projects, concerts, crafts, gardening sessions, parties, story-times, magic shows, and prizes. "Summer @ CALS" fit the bill for the two-month system-wide event.

Jehhy Bouldeh “Bring on Six Bridges 2024”



“I attended one virtual session and three in-person sessions with authors and wish I could have fit in more. The authors were warm and engaging, and often funny, real, and vulnerable in touching ways. Each made a real effort to connect to the audience – nothing felt canned. They were full of candid authenticity and seemed happy to be talking with Arkansas fans of their works. It’s a treat to be able to hear from writers of

this caliber working at the top of their game. I probably most enjoyed David Grann, because I’ve read the most of his books and followed his works the longest; I was thrilled when I realized he’d be here. Rebecca Makkai and Curtis Sittenfeld were full of insights about their compelling female leads and the often sexism-focused culture in which their characters work. Eli Cranor was able to answer a question I had about his newest book, *Ozark Dogs*. I wasn’t familiar with Michael Wang before his session, but his book about the Long March in China piqued my interest. I loved Andrew Sean Greer’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Less*, and am especially excited to delve into its sequel. He was especially charming and witty in his session with Justih Torres, whose brand-new book



is a finalist for the National Book Award. I met Justin when he was here promoting his first novel 11 years ago at this festival’s predecessor, and I’m thrilled to see how much his career has bloomed since then. And all the moderators were articulate and skilled at convening the interviews. I’m so impressed with the quality of programming Six Bridges Book Festival is able to bring to Arkansas. It was beyond question a national-caliber showcase of top writing talent. We’re lucky to have such an opportunity in Arkansas. I am ready for the 2024 Fest!”

–Jenny Boulden, Six Bridges Book Festival attendee



Book Festival

The Six Bridges Book Festival took place September 25 through October 1 and brought in about 50 authors from across the country. The festival began with a series of virtual events, including Stephen Aryan, Ananta Ripa Ajmera, and Caroline Dodds Pennock. In-person events kicked off with David Grann, who spoke to a packed house at the Ron Robinson Theater about his new book, *The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder*, as well as discussing his other book, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, that was made into a blockbuster film starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Lily Gladstone, and Robert De Niro. Another festival favorite and exciting session featured Christian Cooper discussing his book, *Better Living Through Birding*.

Eggshells Kitchen Co. served as host for three chef authors, including Stacey Mei Yan Fong, *50 Pies, 50 States*; Susan Gravely, *Italy on a Plate*; and Sandra A. Gutierrez, *Latinísimo*. Ninety people attended the three events and watched as the chefs made recipes from their respective cookbooks.

At the Hillary Rodham Clinton Children's Library & Learning Center, kids were the center of attention during "Little Readers Rock," in partnership with the Junior League of Little Rock. The all-day outdoor fair created smiling (painted) faces that happily took advantage of the new playground while inside, families were wowed by Tommy Terrific's Wacky Magic Show and later Flurffy and Friends.

Six Bridges Book Festival by the Numbers

Participants: **5,318**

Presenters: **50**

Books given away: **760+**

Books sold: **620+**

Volunteers: **71**
(567.75 total hours)



Banned Books Week

Banned Books Week took place October 1-7 and kicked off with the last event from the Six Bridges Book Festival – a discussion by Maureen Corrigan, chief NPR book critic, "Banned Books; Burned Books: Forbidden Literary Works"—a unique program on the subject of book bannings and burnings in America and Great Britain.

The 12th annual Banned Books Week at CALS celebrated the battle against censorship. This year's event focused on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Corrigan

chose this as one of five banned books everyone should read, and as Ernest Hemingway said, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." This book has been challenged repeatedly due to its supposed lack of "moral" characters and its language.





Construction at CALS Library Square

After the successful capital-improvement millage campaign in 2022, CALS was able to access bonds early in order to renovate multiple branches. The largest renovation was planned for the flagship Main Library. After opening in 1997, it underwent a renovation of the 4th and 5th floors to create more space for patrons in 2011. The Main Library was sorely due for an upgrade, both aesthetically and from a technology standpoint.

Shutting down the largest library in the system that not only welcomes hundreds of visitors each day but also houses many employees was no easy feat. In order to maintain core library services for that community, some decisions had to be made.

In May 2023, the Galleries & Bookstore at Library Square inside the Roberts Library closed its doors in order to make room for the new "Mini Main"

that would house essential library services during the renovation of the Main Library. While many lamented the loss of the galleries/bookstore, people were also concerned about the dedicated crew of CALS employees who ran the retail operation. Worry no more, as all found new roles within the system.

In September, Mini Main opened and the Main Library closed. The building is slated to reopen in 2025 with a new rooftop space, the Darragh Center meeting space relocated to the 5th floor, and the basement converted into a lower level that will have space available for patrons. Boulevard Bread Co. will have a home on the first floor. The exterior will see very few changes, although a new glass vestibule will span the front of the building.

Work at Williams

In November, the Williams Library closed for renovations as well. This project was smaller in scale than the Main renovations, with the library reopening in April

“I consider myself very fortunate to be a part of CALS for the past 15 years. The closure of the Galleries and Bookstore had a profound impact on me and my colleagues. However, we know that was a necessary step in the remodel to the Main Library. I am beyond thankful for the unwavering commitment of our director, Nate, who diligently sought alternative placements for us within the organization. Debra has taken on a new role at the Ron Robinson Theater; Shannon is flourishing with her exceptional art programs enriching patrons' experiences; Lily capably manages the CALS Used Book Sales; and Elizabeth, who is a local artist herself, is now at a branch close to home and loves it. I am confident that I am currently in the right place as part of the Communications team, thoroughly enjoying my new role and the camaraderie of my colleagues. I am looking forward to what 2024 brings.” **—LaReina Fuentes**

2024. The biggest change is that the entrance moved to the west side of the building directly across from Dunbar Middle School. Inside, bold colors were added to the walls along with new flooring. A loft was constructed to take advantage of the high ceilings and add more space for staff. Dedicated kids' and teen areas allow the youngest patrons the ability to enjoy the library without disturbing other patrons. A teaching kitchen space was added to the community room to allow for more food-based programming.

CALS celebrates its support of Arkansas artists with a new collection of contemporary artworks presented at the grand opening of the Williams Library.

Colin Thompson, the CALS Art Administrator, selected artworks by Susan Chambers, Perrion Hurd, Lisa Krannichfeld, CC Mercer Watson, Aneesah Rahman, and Keivon Williams to adorn the walls of the library. CALS would like to thank all the artists and galleries involved: Boswell Mourot, Brandon House, Hearne Fine Arts, and M2 Gallery.



New Sculpture Commissioned for Library Square

In early 2024, a request for qualifications was sent out seeking an artist to create a sculpture honoring the 5,526 Black men who served in Arkansas army units during the Civil War. In late 2023, CALS formed a committee of staff and citizens to select the artist. The committee winnowed proposals down to four who will be invited for interviews after which as many as two will be invited to present formal proposals for the piece. Interviews took place in April 2024.



Día de Muertos

More than just the “day after Halloween,” Día de Muertos, or “Day of the Dead,” is a Mexican celebration that provides the opportunity to remember friends and family who have passed. It is often celebrated by placing the departed’s favorite items on an altar.

The 2023 event took place in Count Pulaski Way between the Roberts Library and the Ron Robinson Theater.

The exhibition of works inside the Roberts Library from the amazing artists in the Latino Art Project, including the Day of the Dead Altar created by the Mexican Consulate, was a smashing success. We broke records for attendance. More than 2,600 people attended the street party and nearly 1,300 people visited the accompanying art exhibition in the Roberts Library’s Underground Gallery. These numbers far exceeded our attendance in 2021 and 2022, and we are thrilled that so many people came out to enjoy and participate in the beautiful and meaningful celebration.



Yuyi Morales Visits Children's Library

On October 14, renowned children's illustrator and author Yuyi Morales spent the day at the CALS Children's Library, where her exhibition *Soñadora* was opening, to be on view until November 15. Brad Mooy, Six Bridges Book Festival Coordinator; Carlos Ignacio Giralt Cabrales, Consul of Mexico in Little Rock; and a few children from the audience were on hand to help open the exhibition, which was supported by a grant from the Arkansas Arts Council. Morales's colorful, fun work was appreciated by all attendees, from the youngest child to a 90-year-old grandmother who made an hour-long trip to see the exhibition.

“Of course, we knew her work from *Viva Frida*, and all her other award-winning books ... a *New York Times* bestseller, so I was excited that she was going to be so close. I was so surprised to hear that this caliber of illustrious artist would be here; I would expect to see someone like that if we go to the annual convention or something. When I heard it on the radio, I knew we were going to be here for this. I didn’t want to miss it.”

-Jacob Harris



Rock, Paper, Run 5K

CALS and the North Little Rock Public Library System (NLRPLS) worked together to celebrate National Library Card Sign-up Month. The two-part event on September 9 included the Rock, Paper, Run 5K and a Cool Down Party. The race started from the NLRPLS Laman Library and ended at CALS Main Library for the Cool Down Party. This event marked the first time the two systems worked together on a program of this size and nature. The event was successful, and both library systems began working on plans for 2024. Due to the renovations happening at Main Library, the 2024 race will begin at Main and conclude at Laman, and Laman will host the after party.

ROCK PAPER RUN by the Numbers

New library card sign-ups: 1,081
Total race sign-ups: 190
Spirit Runners (individuals who paid and signed up with no intention of running): 4
Race participants: 156
Cool Down Party attendees: 250

Barbara's Story, for the Love of Libraries



"I have gone to the library since I was a child and never could get enough. There is the wonderful smell of the books, the orderliness of the stacks, and the eager-to-help staff. All part of the experience. So, when I was asked to be on the Friends of CALS Board, I jumped at the chance and enjoyed every minute of my time there.

I have been on the Board for several years; I started volunteering in 2018 and have

never missed working a sale. I loved watching, then I worked the sale in Spring and in June, and the shoppers flocked to the door and eagerly waited in line for the doors to open. This was especially true after the two-year break for Covid. The happy smiles and joy on their faces was enough to know they missed us.

The 2024 sales will be held in our temporary home at 7773 Sloane Drive. Yes, it's a longer



drive, but the benefits are worth it. A big, bright sales room and plenty of parking. It's a great new place with completely new stock. The money that is made is used to sponsor activities and events for all. A win-win situation."

—Barbara Sodeh, former Friends of CALS Board Member



Friends of CALS

2023 was a year of transition for Friends of CALS. When the Main Library closed, the beloved basement book sale relocated to the first floor of CALS's temporary location at 7773 Sloane Drive. And in December 2023, members of Friends of CALS were invited to vote on a Plan of Dissolution for the organization after CALS's administration and Friends of CALS's board members proposed dissolving Friends of CALS as a 501(c)(3) and consolidating charitable support to the library under one nonprofit umbrella – the CALS Foundation. 95% of voting members approved the plan, and Friends of CALS dissolved as an organization at the end of 2023. CALS committed to continuing to hold the sales in the future, with proceeds supporting library programs. Throughout 2023, Friends of CALS's used book sales raised more than \$50,000 for library programs.



Leaving a Library Legacy

Lisa Donovan Retires

On November 2, CALS staff members from several branches along with other well-wishers gathered at the Hillary Rodham Clinton Children's Library & Learning Center to bid a fond farewell to retiring Deputy Director Lisa Donovan. If you know anything about Lisa, the location of the party was a given. Lisa began her career with CALS when the Main Library opened in its current location in the River Market in 1997. She was hired as a part-time programmer in the Youth Services department. But her early childhood development work started well before that. She said, "My undergraduate studies were in Child Development. I always worked in children's services in some capacity. My first job out of college was director of a daycare center. To this day I consider that the hardest job I've ever tried to do. I left that job when my second child was born. When our children were little I was fortunate to be able to work part time, teaching

preschool, usually in the schools our kids attended." She became Assistant Manager of Youth Services at Main, then was promoted to Manager, followed by Summer Reading Coordinator for the system, then Director of Youth Services for the system, and finally Deputy Director, where she would stay until her retirement. (Lisa is quite adamant that everyone know that she was replaced by not one, but two people!)

Milam Milestones

In July, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Max Milam Library in Perryville. Visitors enjoyed refreshments followed by a program on the history of the library in Perry County presented by Tim Nutt. The evening also featured a dulcimer performance by Peggy Pillow. In November, Denise Northcutt, Milam's Assistant Branch Manager, celebrated her retirement after a 29-year career with CALS. Denise served as Youth Programmer for many years before switching to Adult Programmer and

was responsible for starting several programs that continue at Milam, including a crafting circle for older patrons, dulcimer classes, and providing dulcimers and tool kits for checkout. Her significant contributions to the Perryville community and CALS will be greatly missed.



Giving at CALS

CALS understands the importance of giving back to the communities that we are a part of. In 2023, patrons stepped up in a big way to help us reach our goals. In December, CALS was part of three different drives: **Mister Rogers' Neighborhood Sweater Drive** in partnership with PBS, **Robert "Say" McIntosh Stop the Violence Toy Drive**, and **Food for Fines that benefits the CALS Little Free Pantries**. Thanks to the generosity of our patrons, we were able to donate nearly **1,200 clothing items**, more than **200 toys**, and more than **2,800 nonperishable food items**.

On **Giving Tuesday**, 115 people made donations to CALS, totaling **\$12,330**. CALS received a **\$5,000 matching gift** on top of that. Throughout 2023, 874 donors made gifts to their library, **totaling \$601,557**. They supported initiatives and programs like Summer @ CALS, the Six Bridges Book Festival, meals to victims of the March tornado, the library's legal fund, and much more.



Roberts Library

Blog, Digital Collections, and Media Exposure

The weekly Roberts Library blog was viewed 15,441 times last year. The blog features information about Arkansas history and culture, often spotlighting digitized materials in the archival collection of the Butler Center. The online community history project showing images of historical menus from restaurants around Arkansas went live on the Roberts Library website in May and was viewed 7,450 times before the end of the year.

The Butler Center granted permission for the following projects to use its materials last year:

- Arkansas PBS documentary
- Historic Arkansas Museum exhibit
- *Finding Your Roots* episode
- Historic Washington State Park exhibit
- Mosaic Templars Cultural Center exhibit
- Alexander Street online exhibit
- *The Quarterly* by the Ouachita County Historical Society
- Shiloh National Military Park exhibit
- Delta Heritage Trail State Park exhibit
- Independent film on Joycelyn Elders

Zine Collection

The Butler Center for Arkansas Studies at the Roberts Library has collected over 40 zines from the 1990s to the present. They represent queer culture, the punk scene, poetry, and activism in the state, preserving work from communities not traditionally represented by the archival record.

Community Archiving in Marche

The Butler Center has collected over 400 documents and photographs from the historically Polish Marche community in northern Pulaski County that previously had only a small footprint in the archival record. Community members remain closely attached to their photographs and documents that tie them to their Polish roots. Digitizing and returning materials allowed the Butler Center to collect and provide access to digital copies while allowing the return of the physical items. In conjunction with this effort, CALS created a small temporary exhibit that was at the Maumelle Library in September, and a trifold exhibit and slideshow that were shown to over 900 attendees at the community's annual Polish festival.

EOA

The CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas (EOA) focused on adding new content and features while also improving what was already online. The EOA added about 450 entries and 2,700 images in 2023. Throughout the year, the EOA had visits from all over the world, from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe, from Ukraine to Palestine. In 2023, the site was visited by people in 227 countries, territories, and dependencies.

The EOA added features such as a "surprise me" button on the homepage that takes users to a random entry or image; a "browse by county" option for both entries and media; a "share" button that allows users to easily post an entry or image on social media; and a "print" button that gives users a view optimized for the printed page. The EOA is always adding new photos, newspaper articles, and other media but has especially focused on images of small towns, which sometimes get overlooked. To improve on what is already on the EOA site, staff has started to go back to older entries to fix/update links and refresh content as needed. The EOA also created some downloadable programs for teachers and students to use such as "10 Things You Might Not Know about Arkansas" and "Facts about Arkansas Jewish History."





Noon Year's Eve

Not everyone can make it to midnight, especially some of our youngest patrons, so CALS hosted a “Noon Year’s Eve” party at the Children’s Library. There, guests were treated to a performance from mömandpöp; crafts where they made fireworks on a sticky wall, pipe cleaner crowns, and fruit kabob rockets; and a bingo scavenger hunt. Then everyone gathered in the gallery for a lemonade toast and balloon drop. All told, 465 people stopped by the library to ring in the New Year (even if it was a little early)!

Rock It! Lab

The Rock It! Lab (RIL) is a partnership between CALS and Advancing Black Entrepreneurship (ABE) to help inspire, educate, and connect entrepreneurs, primarily Black, Latinx, women, and veteran entrepreneurs, and to create pathways for them to achieve economic mobility. At the RIL, they can find the tools, guidance, and training necessary to start, grow, and scale their businesses.

“One learning concept that I took to heart was to increase my exposure and to go everywhere I can to connect with people and to share my art. When I connect, I ask about programs that will benefit me as an entrepreneur; there is still so much to know. I am so grateful for the openness from the Rock It! Lab to listen to my ideas and for encouraging me to do my thing; their passion for what they do is amazing.” -Sergio Valdivia



Rock It! Lab Highlights:

16 graduates of Spring Business Incubator Class

Alaysia Brianna, founder of Alyasia's Place Fine Art Boutique, won the Pitch Competition

Arnetta Bradford received \$2,500 to support Hebrews 11:1 Coffee Shop

In 2023, RIL provided 500 hours of technical assistance, held 40 hours of business-focused workshops and training, served 400 individuals through RIL programming, helped launch 30 businesses, strengthened 50 businesses, and assisted in growing another 40 businesses.

Ron Robinson Theater

The Ron Robinson Theater was a bustling hub of entertainment, hosting a diverse array of events and programs that captivated audiences all year. Major acts such as the Well Red Comedy Tour, Luenell, Jonathan Erlandson, and the CALS Teen Film Festival graced the stage, drawing in crowds with their remarkable performances and cinematic showcases. Returning popular film programs like Terror Tuesdays, Noir-vember, and BingoFlix continued to delight audiences with their immersive experiences, while the iconic *Rocky Horror Picture Show* maintained its monthly tradition, enchanting fans with its cult classic charm. Exciting new programs like Exhibition on Screen and *Guitar Wars*

debuted at the theater, adding fresh dimensions to the cultural landscape.



The Ron Robinson Theater also forged meaningful partnerships with organizations such as Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the Made in Arkansas Film Festival, the Jubilee Film Festival, the Celebrate Maya Project, the Art Porter Foundation, ACANSA, the Arkansas Fly Fishers, and the Arkansas Aviation Hall of Fame, as well as collaborating with several local filmmakers. Minor upgrades, including new lobby furniture, additional storage space, and digital displays amplified the theater experience for guests. Attendance soared close to 16,000 throughout the year, representing a 7% increase and reaffirming the theater’s status as a beloved community destination for entertainment and cultural enrichment.

In November, CALS hosted “WesFest” at the Ron Robinson Theater where five Wes Anderson movies were screened over a two-day period. In attendance



were 503 people, with 354 entering raffles for door prizes. Additionally, local author Kristi McKim discussed her book *Rushmore*, about Anderson’s film of the same name.





Top Five Titles

Top 5 Adult Fiction Print

Lessons in Chemistry: A Novel,
Bonnie Garmus
The Boys From Biloxi, John Grisham
Demon Copperhead: A Novel,
Barbara Kingsolver
Simply Lies, David Baldacci
Long Shadows, David Baldacci

Top 5 Adult Nonfiction Print

Spare, Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex
Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI,
David Grann
I'm Glad My Mom Died, Jennette McCurdy
The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times, Michelle Obama
The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder, David Grann

Top 5 Adult eBooks

Verity, Colleen Hoover
Happy Place, Emily Henry
It Starts with Us, Colleen Hoover
It Ends with Us, Colleen Hoover
The Boys from Biloxi: A Legal Thriller,
John Grisham

Top 5 Adult Digital Audiobooks

Fourth Wing, Rebecca Yarros
Spare, Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex
It Ends with Us, Colleen Hoover
I'm Glad My Mom Died, Jennette McCurdy
Lessons in Chemistry: A Novel,
Bonnie Garmus

Top 5 Adult DVDs

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever
A Man Called Otto
John Wick: Chapter 4
Top Gun: Maverick
The Fabelmans

Top 5 Adult Graphic Novels Print

Invincible: Ultimate Collection,
Robert Kirkman
One-Punch Man, One
Chainsaw Man, Tatsuki Fujimoto
Attack on Titan, Hajime Isayama
Lore Olympus, Rachel Smythe

Top 5 Young Adult Fiction Print

The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes,
Suzanne Collins
The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins
The Summer I Turned Pretty, Jenny Han
A Court of Thorns and Roses, Sarah J. Maas
Mockingjay, Suzanne Collins

Top Series Juvenile Fiction Print

Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Jeff Kinney

Programming from the Collections Department



“When I was working at McMath, I was approached about taking on the book club at Woodland Heights senior living community. I readily agreed, since nobody looking for future promotions ever says no to anything. Ha! But these older patrons and I soon bonded over our monthly book discussions, and when I moved to Collection Development early in 2023, Leslie Blanchard was kind enough to let me continue with ‘my’ book club. Sarah Harrison is a retired librarian and the resident organizer of the book club. Muriel Sokolow is a regular McMath patron who found solace and comfort in her new CALS community of readers after her move from Connecticut and the death of her husband. She was thrilled the day I appeared in the activity room at Woodland Heights to take



over the book club that former CALS employee Jeannie Burrus had facilitated before me. We have learned more about life and about each other through books such as *Mudbound* by Hillary Jordan, *The Eighty-Dollar Champion* by Elizabeth Letts, and *Ordinary Grace* by William Kent Krueger. Muriel, Sarah, Anne, Lillian, Craig, Annette, Margaret, Bobbie, Mary Lee, Doris (and her tagalong sister), and I have become a close-knit group. I look forward to each monthly visit.”

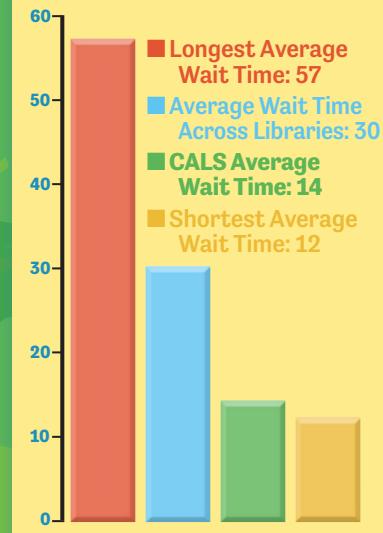
—Kelly Morrissey,
Collection Development Library Assistant

Circulation

Thanks to the millage increase in 2021, CALS could access funds and make significant changes to our collection in 2023. Both physical and digital collections increased, shortening hold times. In a 2023 study of 45 ULC Library hold times, the average wait across all the libraries in the study for a digital book was just under 30 days. The increased collections allowed CALS patrons to enjoy 14-day average waits!

Total circulation for the year was up about 5% over 2022. Physical circulation was down about 4%, but digital was up 20%. This is the first year CALS broke **one million digital checkouts**. Check out the lists on page 22 to see what people took home last year.

Average Number of Days Patrons at 45 ULC Member Libraries Wait for Their Overdrive Holds



HOME



Library Cards

Library Cards Issued in 2023	12,012
Tech Cards	57,000
Total Library Cards	211,784

Physical Circulation

Books	1,005,427
DVDs	274,372
Music CDs	7,793
Books on CD	20,354
MOBIUS/ILL/Mockingbird	7,021
Puzzles	3,932
Tools	1,038
Telescopes	203
Hotspots/Chromebook+Hotspot Kits	850
Fishing Poles	362
Birdwatching Kits	111
Toys	348
Other items	591
Total Physical Circulation	1,322,402

Electronic Resources/Wifi

Wifi Sessions	699,066
Website Visits	1,435,509
EOA Visits	2,297,069
Research Database Visits	422,167
Butler Center Digital Files	486,941

Digital Circulation

Ebooks/comics	401,844
Audiobooks	373,187
Video licenses	796
Videos watched	8,680
Songs	196,907
Music albums	308
Magazines	51,007
Total Digital Circulation	1,032,729

TOTAL CIRCULATION **2,355,131**



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Executive Director

Jo Spencer

Deputy Executive Director of Finance

Eliza Borné

Director of Development

Tameka Lee

Director of Communications
and Community Engagement

Kate Matthews

Director of Public Service

Ellen Samples

Director of Programming



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**CENTRAL
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